

How war and politics affected kandinsky life

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During the time of the completion of this piece, Russia went through cultural and political turmoil. The period of the 1930s was known as the Great Terror or Great Purge as it was during this time that the Russian Communist Party was “purged” of any supposedly disloyal members. It started within the leadership and spread to the common people, with millions of Russian citizens sent to the infamous gulag, Siberian labour camps. This harsh period of time produced many celebrated modern artists, including Kandinsky. Both of the World Wars also helped influence many artists at the time as they sought ways in which to reach catharsis from the events they were witnessing.

However, Kandinsky was mostly inspired by the events that transpired during the Haussmannisation and industrialisation of Paris by Napoleon in the mid-1800s. The architectural, geographical and technological redevelopment of Paris by Haussmann allowed for artists to spend more time in their environments outside as well as inspiring experiments with unorthodox subject matter and representation. This inspired the Impressionism movement, classified by artists such as Monet and Cezanne. Both these artists inspired much of Kandinsky's early work which can be described as Impressionist.

Kandinsky spent much of his later life in both Paris and Germany and had access to the many creative innovations of the time, including the exhibitions and studios of Picasso, Braque and Duchamp, all experimenting with abstracting the world around them, bringing Cubism to life.

Because of a clash of political affiliations, Kandinsky left Germany in 1933. The following war and European atmosphere affected his work inversely as Kandinsky began to focus on lighter subject such as organic imagery and the use of a lighter colour palette. He broke away from his Bauhaus geometry and began to experiment with the Surrealistic styles brought on by artists such as Jean Arp and Joan Miró. His later and more whimsical paintings were also inspired by friend Paul Klee.

Although Kandinsky was forced to leave Germany in 1933 due to political pressures, he did not allow the mood of desolation pervading war-torn Europe to enter the paintings and watercolours that he produced in France, where he remained until his death in 1944. His late works are marked by a general lightening of palette and the introduction of organic imagery; breaking away from the rigidity of Bauhaus geometry, he turned to the softer, more malleable shapes used by Paris-based artists associated with Surrealism, such as Jean Arp and Joan Miró. Kandinsky's late, often whimsical, paintings were also influenced by the playful, intricately detailed compositions of his longtime friend and Bauhaus colleague Paul Klee. These buoyant, biomorphic images, often presented in pastel hues, may be read as signs of Kandinsky's optimistic vision of a peaceful future and hope for postwar rebirth and regeneration.